

St Pius-St Anthony 29th Sunday Ordinary Time Year B2nd

Ever bit off more than you could chew? Or how about as we say after ordering a meal, 'our eyes were bigger than our stomach'? I was recently sitting with my family at dinner and somehow the conversation steered into foods we just can't stomach. My mom reminded me of the time we were all sitting in a Shoney's restaurant, having their buffet. We offered a blessing, and went off to the bar, plates in hand. I was last one coming back, and as I sat back down several faces were grimacing like they had just talked about something unpleasant. She turned to me and said, "Did you get the meat?" And I said, 'Yeah, the Salisbury steak looks good', and she said to me, "I thought so too, but go careful with it, it is 'LIVER'. Oh, now what? (*Waste not, want not?*) Another time at a family reunion, one of my grandfathers had come back from table and before he sat down, my grandma was saying to him, 'You don't like squash, what are you doing?' to which he said, "What, I thought I got the banana pudding". But like today's gospel, when the cup is in our hand or the plate is in front of you, now what? This is similar to what my brother calls that decision point, when you have just hastily taken a drink of coffee, and face a quick decision, "Do you swallow and it burn you all the way down, or spit it out-but where?" Either way, now you have gotten into it! I think that is in essence what James and John are into with today's reading. They want the seats of glory beside Jesus, but do they know what they ordered for themselves? Jesus gently reminds them of what they are biting off, or what they are dishing up for themselves (not sure they get it yet, but they will). In Jesus' own way, he lets them know that they are in for it, that their heads are out too far in front of their skis! We heard several weeks back about Peter getting called down and told to get back in line, and today we hear it happen to James & John (& to all the Twelve). They are so presumptuous and arrogant in their approach and demand of Jesus. For a minute let's look at what is so wrong about what James and John were asking?"

First we need to remember who this is, doing the asking: Recall that James and John could be (how do we say it charitably?) BOSSY (pushy). Three weeks ago, (Mark 9:38) we heard about John bragging to Jesus that he had seen someone he didn't know casting out a demon in Jesus' name and John stopped the man (he shut him down-because the man wasn't of their in-group). Or in Luke 9:54 after a Samaritan town rejected Jesus, James and John bring up to Jesus a call for vengeance, asking, "Do you want us to call down fire from heaven to burn it up?" But, we knew already, that Jesus didn't call them 'Sons of thunder' (Mark 3:17) for nothing. So, it is safe to assume their up to their normal 'trigger-happy' selves. Today, they ask for seats alongside Jesus, one to His right, the other on His left. A good visualization of what they are after, for us Americans would be if we picture the TV screen on the night of the President's State of the Union address to the

country. The President stands in the center at the podium, and then right over each shoulder are seated one on the right and one on left, the 1) vice-president and the 2) speaker of the House or the second in command, and then third in command of our nation. So, James and John are pushing for the monopoly of power from Jesus-they are 'control greedy'. As ever, Jesus is patient with them, and asks, 'Do you know what you are saying?' Because there will be two seats beside Him, reserved for some disciples- but they are the two side crosses of his on Calvary Hill. Jesus asks them if they can drink his cup and be baptized in His baptism. What does that mean? Well, 'To drink someone's cup' means to share their destiny, unite with them-identify with them (like when we say, 'I'll drink after him from his cup-that's my brother') and to 'be baptized' with him means we will 'go through same experiences as him' being immersed in the same life situation-conditions, like when we say we will walk or step into their shoes. James & John don't understand discipleship yet, but they are not alone. I become more concerned about the other ten apostle's too, who get so upset with James/John. More than just James and John are jockeying with Jesus for control over the company here. It says, "When the ten heard this, **they became indignant** at them." What has upset them? James and John beat them to the 'ask' or 'promotion. James and John have cut in the line of succession to Jesus' office! So we have to ask if the other ten, are any less pushy to be the boss in charge? SO, Jesus calls a 'time-out', gathers a huddle and sits them all down to go over what being a Christian disciple leader means. Who is a true Christian leader? Jesus sets the example, by serving others. This saving messiah does not force, coerce, or push anyone around. This messiah-leader gives a hand upon the shoulder, not a knife in the back, he lifts up everyone around him- He doesn't put them down. He celebrates the unseen sacrifice of servants and not the flashy self-promotion of caesars. Jesus tells the apostles that their pushy requests to be in control over others, is more like the power politics of Rome, than by his own servant model actualizing the prophetic teaching of the Old Testament-leading by example, not by power position or controlling office. I particularly like how Jesus points out the bankruptcy of secular-gentile power. He basically says 'No has to guess who is in charge in the Gentile world-their bosses lord their authority over others, letting you know every minute they are boss-they are their own megaphone-I say, I rule, I command'

And Jesus cannot be any clearer how different Christian leadership is by saying, "But it shall not be so among you" (Mark 10:43). No Christian leader is that way. The Christian leader is not tucked away in a whole top floor office, issuing orders to obey from on high. No, he/she is out walking among his workers himself building order by setting the example him/herself of responsive interaction & service. For Jesus, the true Christian leader is the person willing to serve and put others ahead of him/herself. I want to point out that at this point in Mark's gospel

three times already (Mark, 8, 9, 10) Jesus has indicated how he was going to be received as the Messiah in Jerusalem-He'd be persecuted, rejected, falsely tried and executed, before rising again!) Yet, this hadn't sunk in yet among his apostles. Remember too it was only four weeks ago (Mark 9:33-35) that Jesus caught the apostles arguing about who among them was the greatest, to which he sat them down and taught that the greatest was the least- the servant of all the others.

So, what does a Christian leader look like for Jesus and for us? He says, 'the servant', the least and maybe the left behind is often not recognized. We want to follow Him, and we claim to, by being called disciples of Him. So, we need to keep Him and His example always in mind. When Jesus acclaimed Messiah by the people as He entered Jerusalem triumphantly, what did he exhibit or show us? He came on a borrowed simple donkey (like a lowly packmule), saying that He had nowhere to lay his head. As a master at the last supper banquet he knelt down in front of his apostles washing his subjects' feet. He has a crown but it turned out to be, not jeweled and golden, but bushy wooden thorns. And he was lifted high up on a throne, but not a cushy seat but an upright cross (laying his life down for others to live-He put Himself down to pull others up). He came to serve, not be served. So, Jesus calls us to do the same: to humbly and faithfully do our part wherever we are-helping-supporting others, not trying to get ahead of them, but to get behind them-serve others. Lift them up by our own sacrifice. That is a disciple. That is some example to follow! And that is what Jesus calls us to do.